

Using AFRICOM to Counter China's Aggressive African Policies

DREW PETRY

The African continent provides an interesting case study for the future application of American power. Gone are the days of large-scale American invasions of third world countries like Iraq or Afghanistan. Instead, American power is shifting toward more diplomatic and economic pressuring and posturing. Africa is currently the proving ground for this quasi-application, and the recent creation of U.S. Africa Command is the legitimization of this new approach. In the post-Cold War world, world powers must come up with real solutions to problems in the third world, rather than sweeping them under the rug for what may seem to be the greater good. The emerging economic importance of several African nations must be nurtured and welcomed, but also watched closely. Threats to these developing economies (and democracies, in some cases) include terrorism, humanitarian crises, and influence from a possibly mal-intentioned China. U.S. AFRICOM faces these challenges on a daily basis, and must expand its role on the continent to ensure political and economic stability in support of US policy.

Formation and Current Operations of AFRICOM

On 6 February 2007, President George W. Bush formally announced his decision to create a Unified Combatant Command for Africa called U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).¹ US interest in Africa is largely a product

of two factors: the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. For the most part, US involvement in Africa grew only after both of these events had occurred. In fact, in the decade between the Soviet Union's collapse and the beginning of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), there were only 20 military operations on the African continent. Department of Defense war planners publicly stated that the United States "had very little traditional strategic interest in Africa," and ranked the continent last in the Clinton Administration's 1998 inventory of "Integrated Regional Approaches" to US security.² Perhaps the American strategic assessment of Africa in the 1990's was distorted by what might be the only American military intervention well known to the public: the "Black Hawk Down" incident in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993. Along with the 1991 Gulf War, the Battle of Mogadishu was a first conflict of the information age, and combatant commanders were given little chance to take risks, lest the American public think their sons would soon go off to fight another Vietnam. For this reason, American policymakers found it easier to ignore the African continent than to intervene in humanitarian situations, with the 1994 Rwandan genocide standing as the most obvious and terrible example of the consequences of non-intervention.

In the intervening years between the end of American military action in Africa and the 9/11 terrorist attacks,

threats to American security were allowed to fester in Eastern and Northern Africa. Osama bin Laden himself found refuge in Sudan after leaving his home country of Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden spent five years in Khartoum growing Al Qaeda into a beast capable of lashing out at the west. His organization proved its capabilities with the twin bombings of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and a former associate once testified in American court that bin Laden "was busy training terrorists and even trying to buy material for a nuclear bomb."³ After 9/11, the US was forced to reevaluate its assessment of Africa as a strategic non-factor and created AFRICOM.

From its inception, AFRICOM has faced an identity crisis. Its mandate is to promote American interests through military, diplomatic, and economic means. The command's mission statement reads: "AFRICOM, in concert with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy."⁴

AFRICOM reflects the security threats American leaders perceive, and

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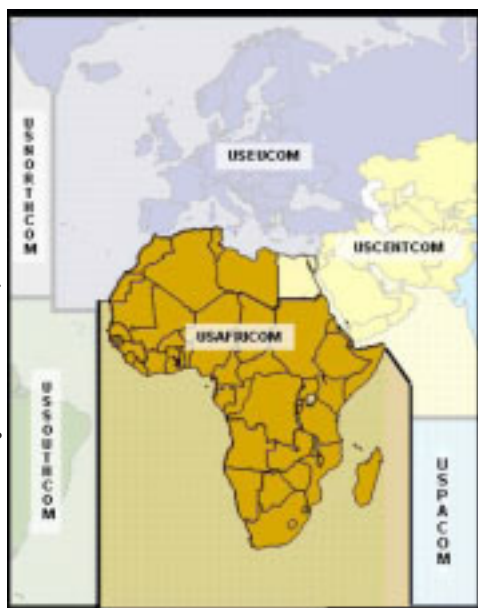
shows the need to prevent Africa from becoming a haven for international terrorist organizations. Barkely writes that “Extreme poverty, ethno-religious divisions, corrupt and weak governance, failed states, and large tracts of ‘ungoverned space’ combine to offer what many experts believe to be fertile breeding grounds for transnational Islamist terror.”⁵ AFRICOM’s dual nature is exposed upon an examination of U.S. economic interests on the continent. As of 2006, U.S. imports of African oil reached 921 million barrels, just under 20 percent of total U.S. consumption; this figure surpassed oil imports from the Middle East, meaning Africa is the largest source for U.S. oil outside the American continents. Additionally, U.S. imports from Africa grew by 51 percent since 2000, while imports from the Middle East fell by about five percent.⁶ The third prong of AFRICOM’s mission, humanitarian aid and development, is the most complex. AFRICOM is the first American military command to heavily include other U.S. government agencies in the DoD planning process. In addition to a non-traditional military role, part of AFRICOM’s identity crisis comes as a result of its piecemeal construction. AFRICOM took chunks of U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Pacific Command and combined them into one operation covering all of Africa except Egypt. The need for reorganization was highlighted after conflicts emerged on the ‘seam’ between EUCOM and CENTCOM, especially in the Darfur region along the Sudan/Chad border. Over time, African crises required more and more of EUCOM’s resources. In 2006, General James Jones testified before Congress that EUCOM’s staff spent more than half its time on Africa issues, up from almost none in 2003.⁷

The map below⁸ shows a graphical depiction of the territory each combat-

ant command gave up to create AFRICOM.

The map opposite⁹ shows Africa with depictions of each nation’s struggle with nourishment and water supply, which provides context for some of the challenges facing AFRICOM and its governmental partners. The map does not show areas of political or armed

AFRICOM



conflict, but there is often a correlation between resource shortages and instability. The Horn of Africa is a particularly challenging region because it faces both severe water stress and high undernourishment, in addition to a lack of governance.

AFRICOM relies on a very small staff to face these challenges. Its component commands include elements from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, and it also hosts special operations forces. “Its staff of 2,000 includes no regular troops, no ‘trigger-pullers,’ unlike its sibling CENTCOM, which oversees Iraq and Afghanistan.”¹⁰ Another feature which distinguishes AFRICOM from typical combatant commands is the lack of permanent U.S. bases within the command’s area of responsibility. AFRICOM is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany and

maintains no permanent bases on the African continent. The closest it comes to a permanent base is the installation at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, which is the leased home of the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), a force inherited from CENTCOM designed to carry out “political, military, and economic activities—particularly in Ethiopia and Kenya—aimed at combating terrorism and strengthening the capacity of regional governments and the well-being of their populations.”¹¹ Until Operation Odyssey Dawn, the designation of NATO’s intervention in Libya, which commenced in March 2011, CJTF-HOA was AFRICOM’s only lasting military involvement on the continent. CJTF-HOA has successfully prevented al Qaeda and other terrorist networks from gaining a feared foothold in the Horn of Africa, mainly through civic action programs and similar stability operations.¹² This means that U.S. power in Africa is centered on the Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, Somalia, and neighboring countries.

Chinese Involvement in Africa

China, with its burgeoning economy and seemingly insatiable thirst for raw material, is aggressively expanding into African countries with rich energy and mineral resources. In order to understand China’s current involvement in the region it is first important to understand the recent drivers of China’s engagement on the continent. In the 1960s, Beijing began to distance itself from its pro-Soviet policies and instead opted for a so-called ‘three worlds’ approach, which recognizes the importance of the developing world in international affairs.¹³ Mao identified China as a developing country in the third world and described Africa as an important player in the struggle against imperialism, but did not invest heavily in an economic partnership between the two regions. Perhaps Mao held on to

the ancient belief that China should be self-sufficient and avoid importing items which it could manufacture or mine itself.

This philosophy changed in the late 1970's when Deng Xiaoping "set China on a gradualist road of capitalist-oriented development that produced three decades of near double-digit growth and a rise in living standards that has brought a nine-fold increase in per capita income to \$1,700 in 2005," and reduced the number of people living in poverty in China from "280 million in 1978 to 140 million in 2004."¹⁴ China's economy continues to grow: The International Energy Agency expects China's oil imports to triple by 2030. The world has likely never seen such an explosive growth rate sustained for such a long period of time. "Chinese demand for raw materials of

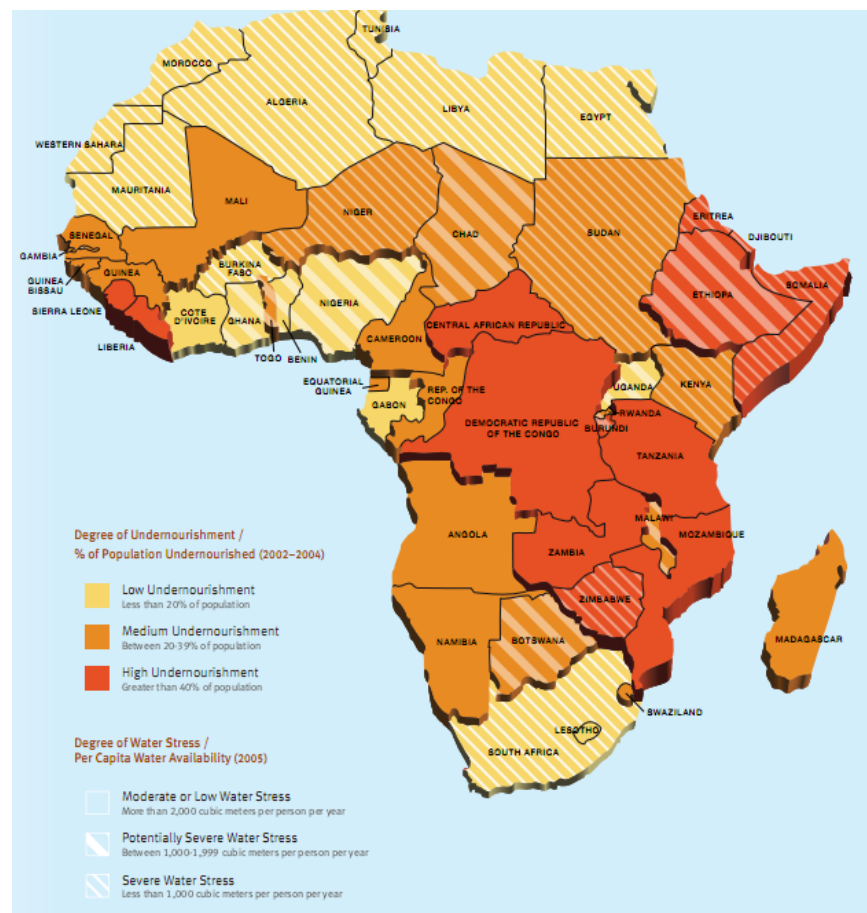
all sorts is growing so fast and creating such a bonanza for farmers, miners and oilmen that phrases such as "bull market" or "cyclical expansion" do not seem to do it justice. Instead, bankers have coined a new word: supercycle."¹⁵

Increased Chinese involvement in Africa is in part designed to counter western dominance. At the 2003 China Africa Cooperation Forum held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said China continues to invest in Africa in part because "Hege-mony is raising its ugly head."¹⁶ This

position resonates well with some African leaders who dislike the strings which are often attached to American aid. One Nigerian businessman says "The US will talk to you about governance, about efficiency, about security, about the environment. The Chinese just ask: 'How do we procure this license?'"¹⁷ Additionally,

initial investment, Chinese corporations have expanded their reach into more oil-rich countries. As a result, 31 percent of China's oil requirements come from Africa, with expansion coming soon after China buys large oil fields in Nigeria's delta region.¹⁹ The China-Africa economic relationship is now

quite large. There are over 800 Chinese companies doing business in 49 African countries, and trade between China and Africa has skyrocketed from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$50 billion just six years later.²⁰ Trade between China and Africa is depicted on the following page, and demonstrates the growth since initial Chinese investments of the early 1990s. It is important to note that about half of the trade relationship comes from Chinese exports to Africa. Many of the items African countries import from China are simple manufactured goods, while a growing proportion



DEGREE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT AND WATER STRESS IN AFRICA

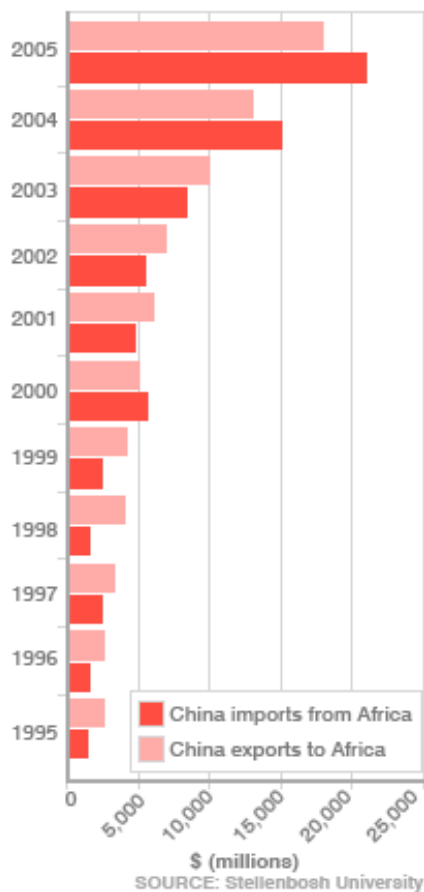
Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe says "China provides a new alternative direction...the foundation of a new global paradigm."¹⁸ These two statements are not representative of thinking shared by all African leaders, but they do explain how easily China has been able to expand its role on the continent.

China's first major investment in African energy came in 1996 when the China National Petroleum Corporation invested in Sudan's oil fields. Today, Sudan supplies ten percent of China's oil requirements. In the years since this

includes tech products such as televisions and computers. In total, about \$15 billion of the goods African countries import from China are from manufacturing or machinery and transportation sectors.²¹

Also depicted on the next page is a by-country breakdown of the amount of Chinese investment going into Africa. The red or darker shaded states show that China is not focusing on one specific region, or solely on oil producing nations. China is concerned with its long term trade relationship with the

CHINA'S TRADE WITH AFRICA



continent, and investing in many countries buys political capital while simultaneously undercutting the West's ability to create the hegemony Premier Jiabao spoke of at the 2003 Economic Forum.

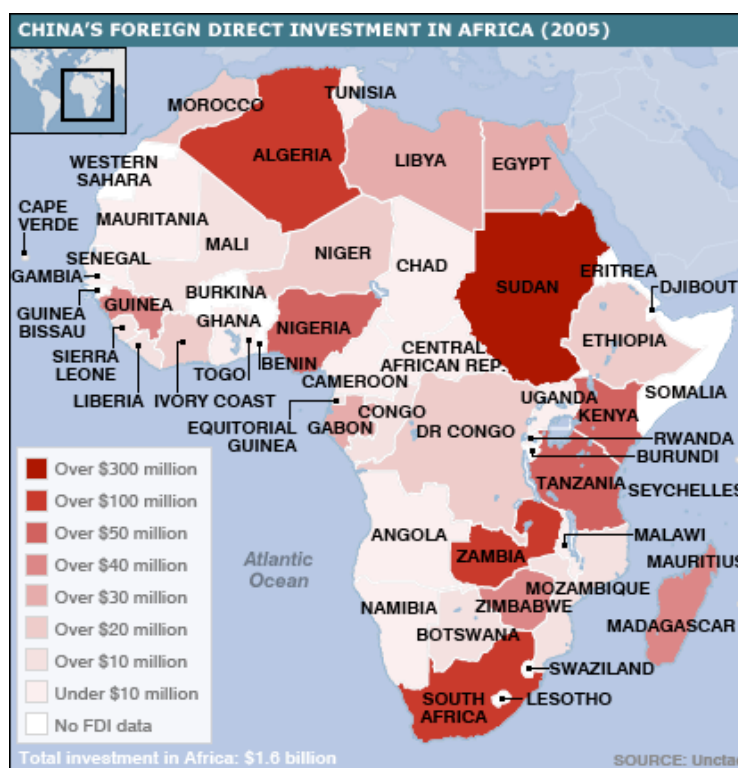
A byproduct of China's long term trade goals is that Chinese enclaves are showing up in African cities. The pioneer generation of immigrants is establishing what is known as a bridgehead, just as Chinese miners and railroad workers did in 19th century California. Once the bridgehead is established, workers will begin to recruit family members to join the growing business opportunities in their adopted home. With up to 50,000 Chinese nationals already living in countries like Nigeria, the bridgehead is clearly established and reports "indicate that a strong prevalence for family recruiting is already underway."²⁴

There is little doubt that China's increased economic presence on

the continent benefits Africa's poor. According to analysts working for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the "intensified aid and trade links with China have resulted in higher economic growth rates, better trade terms, increased export volumes, and higher public revenues. This is far from saying 'all is well,' but any quality of life improvement in some of these nations is to be preferred over the status quo."²⁵

China has paired increased investment with increased political influence in Africa. Some scholars believe that China is attempting to portray itself as

Some African leaders view successful Chinese involvement in Africa as a sign that Western political and economic models will not work on their continent. They are impressed by China's ability to lift 400 million of its citizens out of poverty and improve the quality of life for its remaining citizens, all in the span of 20 years. This economic development sans democracy warrants concern for the West and for AFRICOM. Western leaders must be aware of the risk of African countries choosing political stability and economic progress over human rights and democracy.²⁸



CHINESE FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN AFRICA IN 2005

an alternative political and economic model compared to the West. The best example of China's desired future role in African politics is seen by its willingness to finance the design and construction of the African Union's new headquarters building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at a cost of \$150 million²⁶ (depicted on the opposite page).²⁷

AFRICOM's Strategic Response to Increased Chinese Presence

AFRICOM must convince the people of Africa that political and economic progress is possible even with high standards for human rights and democracy. Winning the hearts and minds of average Africans by convincing them that America is a force for good which offers stability and security

is the best way of ensuring victory over Chinese influence as well as extremist groups such as al Qaeda. The best way to win hearts and minds is to enable Africans to improve their own lives. One action designed to win hearts and minds was a two-ship cruise of US Navy ships through West Africa which took place in 2008. During the cruise, the ships stopped in seven countries along the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea and “came ashore to mend roads, renovate schools and health clinics, bring medical supplies and provide free health care,” as well as military training to host nation security forces.²⁹ A Naval officer in charge of the cruise stated that he saw cer-

tain strengths about AFRICOM’s operation, including a change in mindset from “‘We’re going to take the beach’ to ‘we’re going to deliver supplies to the beach.’”³⁰ This sense of cooperation and willingness to shift from a war mindset to one of civil-military cooperation is critical to AFRICOM’s success in the future. This mission, dubbed the Africa Partnership Station, represents the first effort to reach out to energy-rich African nations fearful of increased U.S. military presence in the region.

More hope for success in convincing Africans to turn simultaneously towards democracy and economic growth comes from Nigerian Senate President Ken Nnamani. In a welcome address for Chinese President Hu Jintao

in April 2006, Nnamani stated that “no nation can sustain economic development in the long run without democracy.”³¹ AFRICOM leadership must take advantage of this homegrown African realization and use it to stem the Chinese influence rolling through Africa.

In order to be seen as a legitimate force, AFRICOM must tell the truth and say that its economic intentions in

navies and armies to stop thefts of crude oil, illegal fishing and immigration, drug trafficking and piracy. All these hurt local economies, undermine political stability and threaten to turn poor countries into failed states, such as Somalia, that may breed terrorism.³²

Since at least the 1990’s, the spread of democracy has been seen as a conflict management strategy. The advent of a

command dedicated to establishing stability in Africa shows that the US Government recognizes that “sustained stability depends in part on Africa’s economic development, which requires attention to the processes of conflict management and effective governance.”³³ Understanding the importance of democracy to economic success provides a roadmap for AFRICOM’s future,



DESIGN OF NEW AFRICAN UNION BUILDING

Africa are not entirely pure. America is obviously attempting to wean itself from oil imported from unstable regions such as the Middle East. Being open about this fact allows American policymakers to portray American-African partnerships as win-win situations. AFRICOM’s attempt at building goodwill in oil-rich countries on the Gulf of Guinea back in 2008 provides an example of this forthrightness:

“We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t in [American] interests,” acknowledges Commodore Nowell. Despite the talk of soft power and the much-vaunted humanitarian aspect of the naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea, the real emphasis is still on security. It is plainly in America’s interest to help African

and is especially important in light of the so called “Arab Spring” or Awakening taking place across North Africa. There is perhaps no purer form of democracy than for the people to directly overthrow and remake a government the way they see fit. AFRICOM should observe how these countries choose to remake themselves, and must do its best to insert as much American goodwill as possible. With good fortune, countries such as South Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia, and others will turn wholeheartedly towards democracy and prove China wrong: that economic success and western-style democracy are not mutually exclusive but rather are complementary.

Conclusion

Integrating Africa into the global economy is a necessary step in the march toward stability throughout the continent. Economic “reform is one of the most critical priorities if Africa is to grow and become more fully integrated into the global economy.”³⁴ The United States must expand AFRICOM’s role in order to provide it with the ability to foster goodwill, represent American economic interests, and support emerging democracies. AFRICOM’s role should be expanded militarily to shut down al Qaeda, diplomatically to anchor military opinions, and economically to provide aid and training to African countries. One measure of AFRICOM’s success will be its ability to manage crises effectively without overreacting. As one Department of Defense official put it, the U.S. Government can consider AFRICOM a success “if it keeps American troops out of Africa for the next 50 years.”³⁵

NOTES

¹ Russell L. Barkely, *AFRICOM: Security, Development, and Humanitarian Functions* (New York: NOVA Science Publishers, 2009), 4.

² Ibid, 6.

³ Andrew Harding, *Bin Laden’s Sudan Links Remain*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1559624.stm>>.

⁴ About US Africa Command, <<http://www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp>>.

⁵ Barkely, 7.

⁶ Patrick M. Cronin, *Global Strategic Assessment 2009: America’s Security Role in a Changing World* (NDU Press: Washington, D.C., 2009), 322.

⁷ Barkely, 54.

⁸ “About US Africa Command,” <<http://www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp>>.

⁹ Patrick M. Cronin, *Global Strategic Assessment 2009: America’s Security Role in a Changing World* (NDU Press: Washington, D.C., 2009), 329.

¹⁰ A Light Footprint: The Pentagon’s Unusual African Arm, <<http://www.economist.com/node/18561821>>.

¹¹ Cronin, 311.

¹² Cronin, 314.

¹³ Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction* (Routledge, New York, 2009), 132.

¹⁴ Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (Zed Books: New York, 2007), 10.

¹⁵ The New Colonialists: China’s Hunger for Natural Resources, <<http://www.economist.com/node/10853534>>.

¹⁶ Alden, 16.

¹⁷ Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz, *China’s Expansion Into the Western Hemisphere* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C., 2008), 224.

¹⁸ Ibid, 224.

¹⁹ Alden, 12.

²⁰ Ibid, 14.

²¹ Ibid, 19.

²² Adam Blenford, *China in Africa: Developing Ties*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7086777.stm>>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Robert I. Rotberg, *China Into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Brookings Institute Press: Washington, D.C., 2008), 287.

²⁵ Eric C. Anderson, *China Restored* (Praeger: Denver, 2010), 59.

²⁶ Blenford.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rotberg, 287.

²⁹ Americans Go A-Wooing: The Pentagon Courts Governments in Africa, Especially Where There’s Oil, <http://www.economist.com/node/11021220?story_id=11021220>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rotberg, 289.

³² Americans.

³³ Lieber, 217.

³⁴ Princeton N. Lyman and Patricia Dorff, *Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know About Africa and Why it Matters* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C., 2007), 210.

³⁵ Barkely, 59.

South Sudan’s Independence From Sudan Recognized by African Union

(online at: <http://www.au.int/>)

15 August 2011 – “This is a historic day for South Sudan and for the African Continent as well.” With these words Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union, warmly welcomed General Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

An enthusiastic South Sudanese Delegation celebrated its admission to the African Union. Dr Ping announced that the AU Member States had promptly accepted South Sudan as the 54th Member. Moreover, he expressed his wish to see the two Sudan’s working “towards ensuring lasting peace and stability.” Speaking of a “crucial moment” for the Republic of South Sudan, Mr Ping mentioned the pending organization of an African Solidarity Conference on Post- Conflict Reconstruction and Development for Sudan “with the view to mobilizing support for the new nation, from within and outside Africa.”

In his statement General Salva Kiir Mayardit declared that his country had already ended hostilities in the “longest civil war in Africa” and chosen “freedom, justice and equality” as key words for the future. He also promised to “do everything possible to realize a smooth and successful transition”, living in peace with the “brothers and sisters” of the Republic of Sudan, and to take the Declaration of Independence of South Sudan “as the beginning of a new struggle.”